

ANTHROPOMORPHIC STONE POUNDERS IN NEW ZEALAND

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Abstract. Stone flax pounders from different areas are compared to suggest a pattern of distribution and a derivation of one particular group commonly known as "Taranaki" pounders.

New Zealand pounders or beaters, whether in stone, wood or bone all seem to share one characteristic which sets them apart from all others in Polynesia: they are nearly all side pounders rather than tip pounders. In Polynesia, where pounders are employed principally for food preparation, they are used with a motion that places the tip or striking surface parallel with the palm of the hand but separated from it by the body of the pounder which is held at a right angle to the palm. In New Zealand, a pounder is held parallel with the palm of the hand by grasping the handle. The striking surface, which is a side about one-third of the distance from the tip, is parallel with the palm but forward of it by the length of the pounder between the hand and striking surface.



Fig. 1. A.M. 30841 Loc. probably Northland. Polished basalt. Length 25cm.
Gift E. E. Vaile.

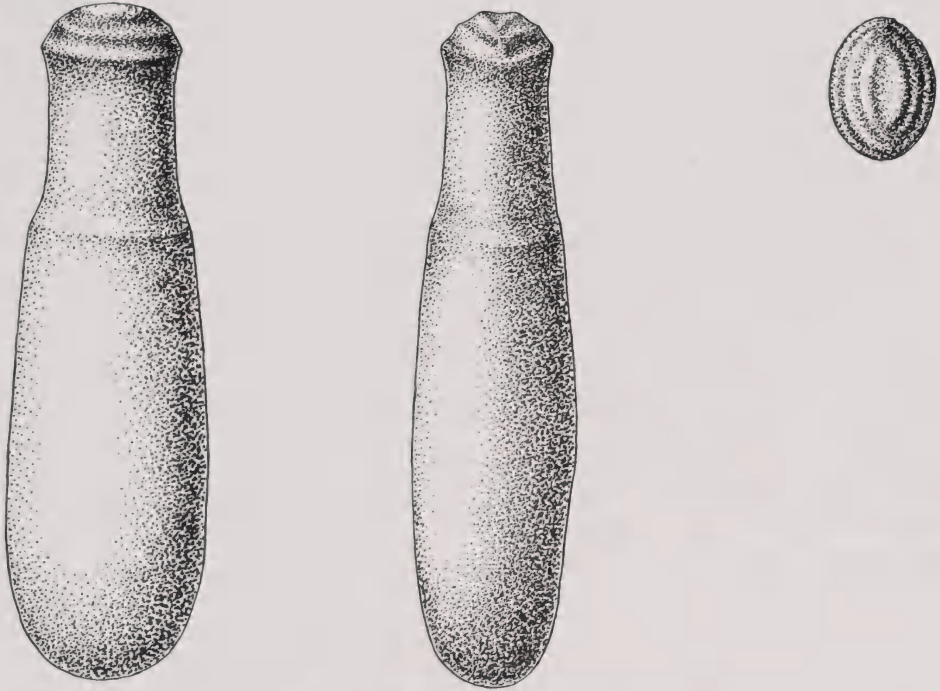


Fig. 2. A.M. 31075 Loc. Waiuku, Manukau Harbour. Polished basalt. Length 26.5cm. Gift J. Arkle.

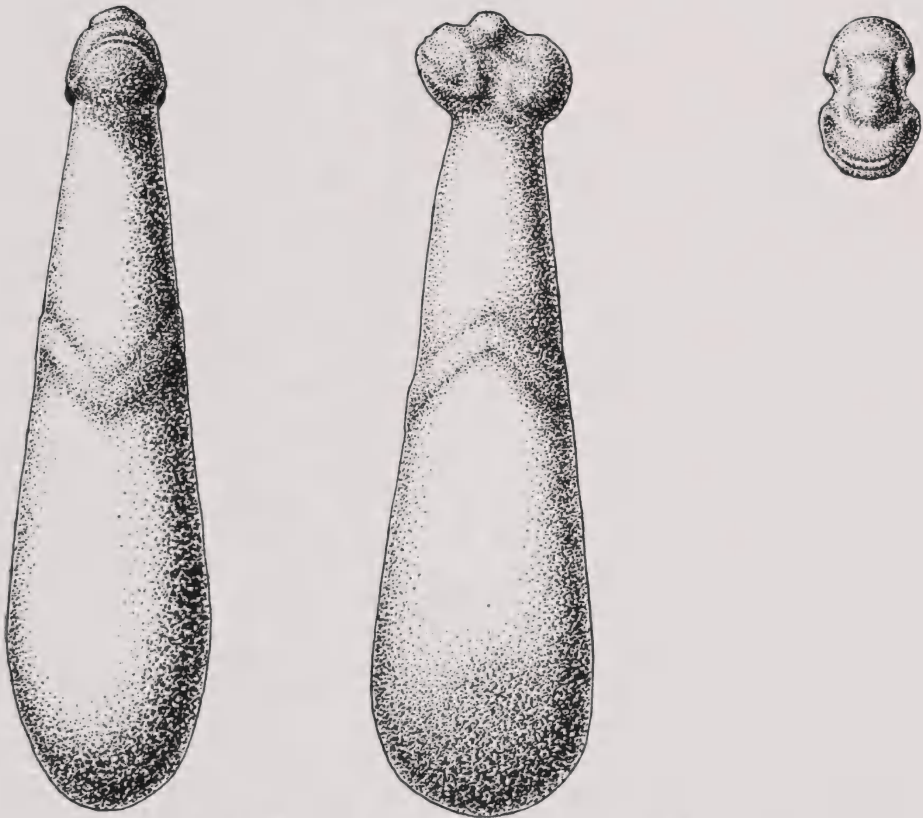


Fig. 3. A.M.20091 Loc. Taranaki. Fine andesite. Length 30.5cm. Vaile Collection.

Pounders or beaters of this latter type were used in New Zealand for a number of different purposes. Wooden ones were utilized for beating the fibre from fern root (*Pteridium esculentum*) or for preparing other vegetable foods. Specialized wood, or more commonly bone examples were used as mallets for wood carving, or longer wooden examples as simple mallets for driving in stakes in such constructions as eel weirs. Stone examples were also used or made for these purposes either as simple pebbles, or roughly or finely worked into beaters, pounders or mallets.

One particular group of stone pounders was used to soften the fibre of flax (*Phormium tenax*) in preparation for the finger weaving of cloaks or other textile items. This style of weaving is a local evolution in New Zealand made necessary by demands of a temperate climate (see Te Rangi Hiroa 1926). The two associated tools, the flax pounder and weaving stick, were also local developments (Te Rangi Hiroa 1950, p. 168). The stone pounders (*patu muka*) were used to beat the hanks of prepared flax fibre on a flat stone.

The commonest and most widely distributed forms of stone pounder are round in section with a rounded end, a reduced hand grip and a rounded butt sometimes ornamented with grooves similar to those on the butt of a fighting club (*patu onewa*). One variety is very bulbous (Fig. 1) and is fairly common in Northland, central North Island and more rarely in North Taranaki the East Coast and the South Island, while a second variety, less bulbous and often parallel sided (Fig. 2) is found in Northland, Auckland, Bay of Plenty and East Coast areas. The distribution of these two main varieties tends to be complementary but is not exclusive.

A third variety has a rounded butt overhanging the base of the handle. From this point to the striking edge the diameter of the club increases gradually with no clearly defined shoulder at the junction of the handle and body. This variety of pounder is often furnished with anthropomorphic features on the butt, panelling or chevrons on the body. In some instances the body is covered with spiral or other designs. A pounder with elaborate designs over the whole body was probably associated with some form of ceremonial function.

Simple pounders of this variety without special features are found mainly in Northland and Taranaki. The anthropomorphic forms have so far been recognized as "Taranaki" pounders. Their distribution is so regional, in fact, that the occurrence of this variety outside Taranaki has often been questioned by curators when cataloguing collections. The occurrence of a fine-grained andesite from Mt Egmont in the area between Omata and Inglewood in North Taranaki could be accepted as an explanation of the abundance of pounders in that area and trade invoked for the subsequent distribution within the area. This could explain the occurrence but not the elaboration.

THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC POUNDER

The characteristics of the anthropomorphic yet still practical Taranaki pounder are shown in Fig. 3. In Taranaki Museum, New Plymouth, are many very elaborate and beautifully made specimens (Fig. 4). The fairly simple form is the one being considered here.

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Please contact Auckland Museum for more information.

Fig. 4. Anthropomorphic pounders in Taranaki Museum.

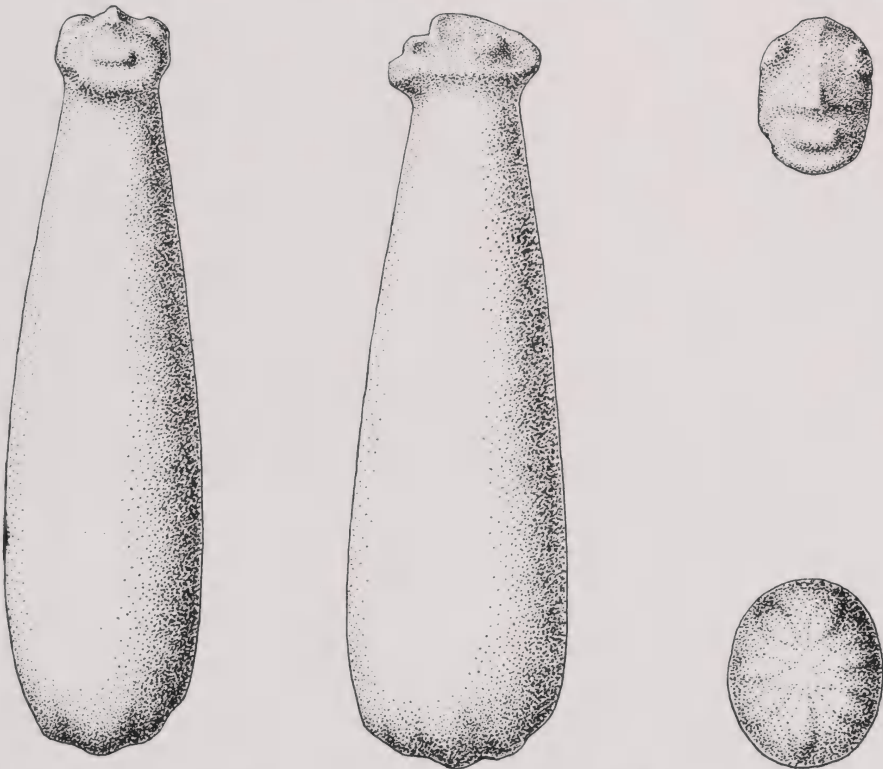


Fig. 5. A.M. 7984 Loc. unknown. Fine andesite, possibly of Taranaki origin.
Length 30cm. Ex Tod Collection, Rotorua.

This simple form has a head on the butt facing away from the pounder, and may have chevrons on the shoulder and raised lines separating the body of the pounder into panels. These latter are sometimes ground flat to give almost a four or five-sided cross section to the body. Fig. 3 has a fairly small head on the butt; in some pounders this feature is quite big, with spiral eye forms and other facial elaboration.

Fig. 5 has no locality but came from a collection in Rotorua. The form of the head on the butt is unlike those of Taranaki. In profile the outline of the face is curved and is really eyes and mouth added to the central nose line on which the face is based. The rest of this pounder is unadorned except for the tip which has been divided into a roseate pattern with incised grooves.

Fig. 6 was found on Waikaraka Beach, Onehunga, on the Manukau Harbour at Auckland. The stone appears to be a local andesite. The head on the butt parallels very closely the head on Fig. 5. At the shoulder point there are chevrons with raised lines leading from each angle down the body of the pounder. In this example "typical" Taranaki features are allied with a head form very different from those in Taranaki.

Fig. 7 is from Kawakawa in the Bay of Islands. The head on the butt in the proportions of mouth width to forehead width has a resemblance to the Taranaki butt faces. A similar head is found on a wooden pounder from Waipu in the Frazer Collection in Auckland Museum.

Fig. 8 is also from Kawakawa in the Bay of Islands. It has a head on the butt with prominent circular eyes, a rounded mouth with parted lips and forehead knob. The shoulders are ornamented with a chevron on each side. These features would appear to be somewhat crudely done but otherwise unremarkable if it were not for the carefully notched vertebrae shown on the back of the handle connecting the butt head and chevrons which are in reality the arms of the figure. The pounder itself is a human figure. This pounder suggests that the origin of the special features of the Taranaki and the Onehunga pounders are simplified from a total human concept as illustrated in this pounder. The form of the head used on the butt suggests Polynesian parallels and would appear to be ancient. It is interesting to note that a simplified form consisting of circular protuberances and the forehead knob is found on the butt of a Duff type 1A adze (Duff 1959) found at Turangi in the central North Island. (This adze is in the Tongariro Information Centre.)

In Taranaki the chevrons occur but no antecedents for them have so far been seen. In the Kawakawa pounder the antecedents are present in the form of arms on a human figure. A reflection of these antecedents is seen in Fig. 9 a Taranaki pounder with circular collar elaborated into hands on the "belly" of the pounder, and in Fig. 10 where one specimen has a row of square notches on the "spine".

Fig. 11 illustrates the common form of late bulbous pounder. This specimen was in the possession of Te Horeta of the Bay of Islands until given to Dr Lee in 1874. It is unusual in having the butt elaborated into a face, showing that even in the late period the anthropomorphic association of these pounders was not entirely forgotten, though they were more normally ornamented, if ornamented at all, with the ridged butt borrowed from the *patu onewa* club.

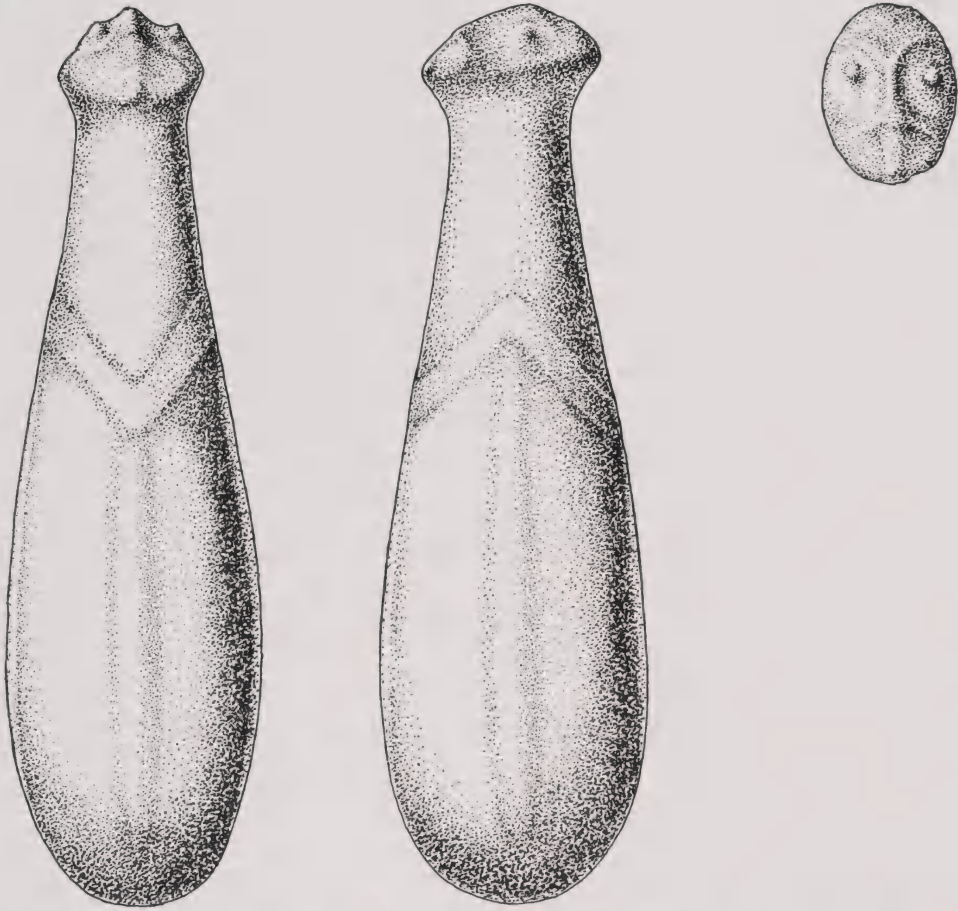


Fig. 6. A.M. 20266 Loc. Waikaraka Beach, Onehunga. Local andesite with small black crystals. Length 35cm. Gift W. C. Hill.

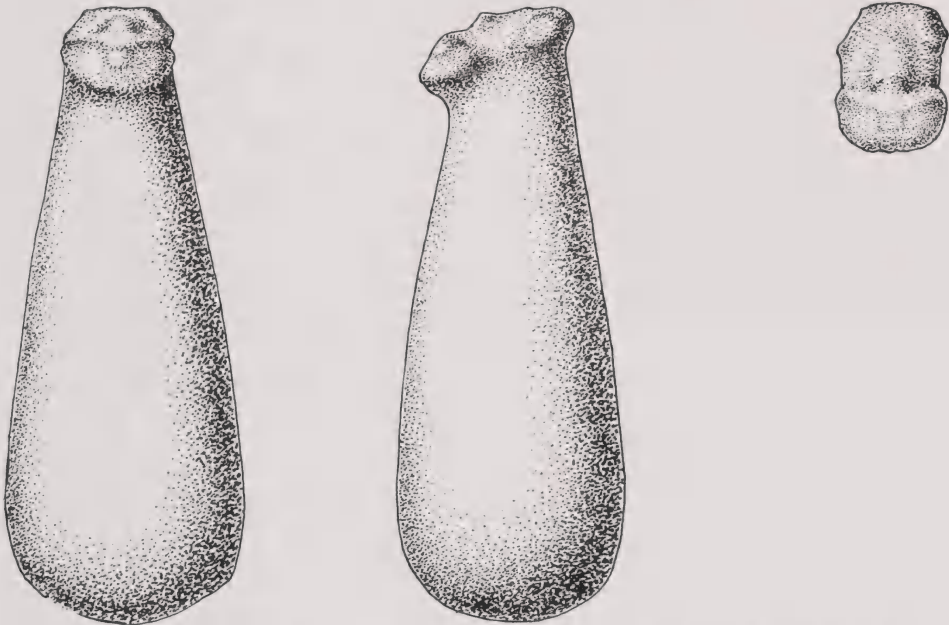


Fig. 7. A.M. 5056 Loc. Kawakawa, Bay of Islands. Local andesite with large black crystals. Length 23.5cm. Gift G. Graham.



Fig. 8. A.M. 5057 Loc. Kawakawa. Local andesite. Length 28cm. Gift G. Graham.

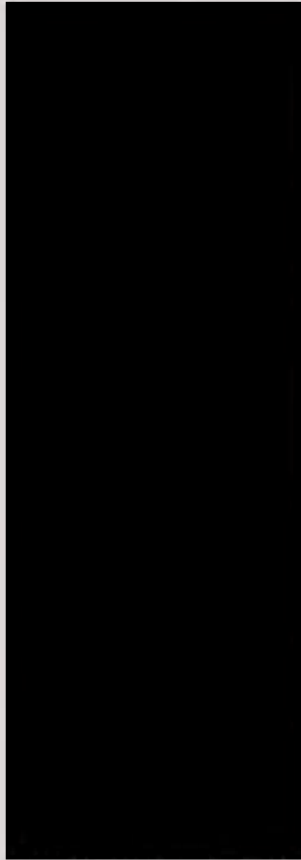


Fig. 9. Pounder with hands. Loc. Westtown, New Plymouth. Taranaki Museum, L. O. Taylor.

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Fig. 10. Elaborate pounders in Taranaki Museum.

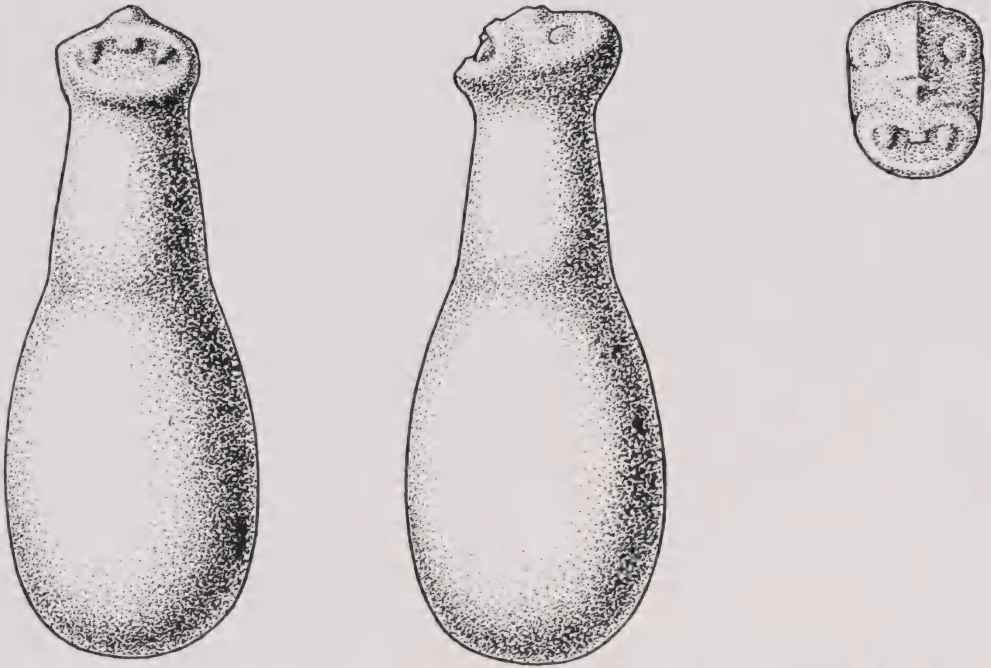


Fig. 11. A.M. 475 Loc. Bay of Islands. Andesite. Length 24cm. Gift Dr A. Lee.

CONCLUSION

It is suggested that the antecedents of the elaborate Taranaki variety of flax poulder is to be found in a completely anthropomorphic shape as illustrated in the poulder from Kawakawa (Fig. 8).

The occurrence of a similar poulder made from local stone at Auckland and possibly from the central North Island or North Taranaki, suggests a line of connection between the two areas. The differences in the carving of the heads on the butts would also suggest that the Kawakawa, Auckland, and Taranaki pounders stand in a regional relationship which is also probably a time relationship.

The possible derivation of classic Maori culture from a centre or centres in Northland is a theory which has been put forward in recent years (Groube 1968, Simmons 1969). The evidence of a few pounders and of the degeneration or simplification of the anthropomorphic form of these between Northland and Taranaki is not conclusive but is certainly suggestive.

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